

Easter (Vigil) 2022

(Last night at the vigil/Tonight), we heard the salvation narrative.

This is the story of the purpose of our existence.

In Genesis, we heard how God created us for the sheer joy of being in relationship and declared that creation was very good.

We may recall this each time someone tries to get us to believe that the world is evil or needs some fundamental change which only a certain person can bring about, those, in other words, who would have us follow them rather than God.

The world is not fallen or broken.

It is functioning exactly as God intended.

Christ did not incarnate as Jesus to fix the world.

He came to remind us that the world, as created through Christ, was meant to provide an opportunity for loving relationship.

We then heard from Exodus how God saves us from slavery.

The release of the Israelites, in other words, was not a one-time event.

God frees us from enslavement to all sorts of ideologies.

It is a reading so powerful that all mention of Moses and the Exodus was expurgated from the slave Bible used to teach slaves in the West Indies a religion, I would not call it Christianity, as there is no love without freedom.¹

God wants us to be free to be ourselves, just as God created us.

It was very good.

Ezekiel emphasizes the point that relationship with God cleanses us from all those things in which we mistakenly seek salvation, all the things we believe in order to avoid facing our own souls.

People will even believe that the earth is flat in order to feel superior and avoid acknowledging their own limitations.

A relationship with God means bringing who we truly are to God, not who we want God and others to think we are.

From the salvation narrative, we learn that all of creation is geared toward moving us closer and closer to God.

This is the promise of the resurrection that we celebrate at Easter.

When we are facing difficulties, in other words, the story is not over.

They are a path forward to something greater, to new life.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/14/opinion/passover-exodus-story-redemption.html?searchResultPosition=1>

In fact, challenges play an important role in what is to come, an important role in freeing us from insecurity, jealousy, and vanity so that we may be fully who we are, strengths and weaknesses, light and dark, and know that God loves us as we are.

If the Egyptians had only faced the various challenges that God sent them, their hearts would have grown and they would have entered into meaningful relationship with the Hebrews.

The problem, the salvation narrative is telling us, is not out there, but in our hearts.

We must face what *is* in order that we, too, might gain new life, might resurrect.

Sadly, Christianity got this turned around.

We started looking for the living among the dead, life where there was none.

We were told that we needed salvation *from* God rather than salvation in the arms God.

When one needs to be saved *from* the creator of the universe, one naturally feels fearful of one's humanity, one seeks to hide one's created imperfection (what God said was very good) in order not to displease God.

Though we were created to be incomplete and to rely on one another, that

incompleteness thus becomes for us not a source of connection to others, but of fear that God will condemn us.

As a result of thinking that God is in danger of not loving us, we hide behind facades, yet we cannot hide and love at the same time.

When we then read that we are to love our neighbors, and if we fail at that, be punished forever by a God who does not love us, we hide all the more, and love even less.

The result of this psychological bind is shame, a shame that enslaves us to those who would take advantage.

Fear and shame in no way encourage us into the arms of God and have no place in the salvation narrative.

They cause us to be removed from the presence of God, like Adam and Eve, whose shame prevented them from enjoying their relationship with God.

God asked them, “Why are you covering yourselves up? Why are you hiding from me?”

It was that shame that prevented them from remaining in Eden.

It is in our hiding that we reject relationship and mistreat our sisters and brothers, even to the point of literally enslaving them.

When we understand the salvation narrative, we know that we need not try to hide parts of ourselves.

The reality is that God is always ready to receive us just as we are, that God always loves us, that God has planned the universe such that we grow closer and closer to God, if we allow.

If we pay attention and are honest with ourselves, our hearts grow.

Resurrection is part of God's plan for the world—creation, experience, growth, resurrection.

It is our way back to God.

When we understand that we are moving towards salvation not *from* but *in* God, we go from fear to awe, from shame to joy, from trying to please to gratitude.

It is a wonderful thing to gather together to celebrate our creator who made us just so that we can all be together, can all share the joy of love, a creator who has given us the tools to grow in our relationship *with* God.

We know from our progression from Palm Sunday through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday that growth is not without challenge, but we also know that it is well worth the reward of resting in God.

It helps, of course, to be a part of a loving community.

The journey is easier, in other words, with the support of companions.

Resurrection is not something that occurs after our deaths.

It is not an extension of life as a reward for pleasing God, but a finding of new life in
God.

We are invited to the wedding feast now.

Some put off going because they have other things they want to do.

They think they have a better way forward, which involves fear- and shame-driven
projects of escape and scapegoating.

Meanwhile, the rest of us celebrate together God's wonderful accomplishment, God's
creation of life and relationship.

Resurrection is not an idle tale.

Once we let go of those things that turn us away from God, we are free, free to love, free
to enjoy the beauty of existence, free to be comfortable in our own skin, free to
rejoice in God.

This is the joy of the resurrection.

No more chasing escapes.

No more fear of rejection.

No more feeling of shame.

Just joy in our place in the universe.

This does not mean that we will not still experience loss, frustration, anger, but we will
know that they are pushing us towards God who is waiting with open arms.

Alleluia, the lord is risen!